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THE PART OF THE HOME IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION¹

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This general subject has already been ably discussed in certain aspects before this Association.² The present contribution will come from a different field of study.

I. Historical. The domestic group or "matrimonial institution" has assumed many forms during the rise and development of civilization, and humanity has tried all possible kinds of experiments in order to come to the conclusion to make monogamy, with all it implies, the law of social order; and the impulses of the race tend to become innate, and the customs traditional, which require this form to be perpetual. In all stages, from the earliest mother-group to the modern family, the domestic community has always been the primary association of human beings, the undifferentiated stock out of which all the specialized agencies and institutions of society have grown. It would be incredible to think that all this long racial experience has left no trace in our physical nature, our deep instincts, our traditional conceptions, our social organization, our methods of regulating conduct.³

While there has been no one universal order of specialization, there has been in general an advance from the condition in which the domestic group, or the closely knit blood-kin, did almost everything for itself without exchange of goods and services, to the present situation in which the bread-winner of a family buys all he needs for his own by the exchange of one form of service for all that the world has to offer.

In an isolated and restricted group, like that of Abraham, for

¹ An address given before the Religious Education Association, at its Third Annual Convention, Boston, Mass., February 12-16, 1905.

² By President George B. Stewart and Rev. Jean F. Loba, in *Proceedings of the Religious Education Association*, 1903, pp. 108-23.

³ The discussion here is necessarily a mere fragment. In Howard's *History of Matrimonial Institutions*, a profound study may be followed.

example, the little association of parents, children, relatives, slaves, and attached persons had to protect itself from beasts and men, from flood and fire, from disease and accident; it must nurse its own sick without aid of special physicians; it must produce its own supplies of food, clothing, shelter, light, heat, utensils, with limited barter; it must carry and transport persons and belongings; its social influence was confined to a small circle; its morality was the regulation of conduct for few persons in simple relations; its religion devised images and feelings from nature without and from the relations of near kindred; its law was parental command, tempered by tradition and enforced by direct and obvious means. Therefore educational methods were exclusively domestic; the parents communicated the scanty tribal stock of knowledge, moral maxims, technical devices, often without aid of the written records of wide human experience.

In some degree even a modern family passes through similar stages, although the process is shortened, modified, and at last terminated by the socialization of industry, government, ecclesiastical activity, and schools.⁴

Even now, and in the complicated life of a city, the family is an important industrial organization, cares for the health of its members, is alert to protect them from danger, governs them by a domestic code, judges their causes, disciplines them for faults, instructs them in arts and science, trains them in morality, furnishes them a sanctuary for worship. Only gradually, with reluctance and pain, do the parents transfer their offspring to the larger life of the world and surrender their leadership in culture and control.

There is no one "underlying idea" in the family which will account for it. The family grows naturally out of all the elementary desires of our human nature, physical, æsthetic, ethical, and spiritual. To say, with one very interesting writer, that *obedience* is the "underlying idea" is to make us satisfied with a partial and superficial explanation. The family is a complete community of material and mental goods, and attempted simplification of interpretation is distortion and mutilation. All later and larger forms of association

⁴ A beautiful and suggestive chart is found in Small and Vincent, *Introduction to the Study of Society*, p. 250.

merely enlarge and specialize the activities of the domestic group. It is precisely this fact which gives to the family its unique place and importance in relation to education and social progress. Religion, morality, culture, noble politics, all interests suffer, if domestic conduct is defective or immoral.

II. The educational function of the family is permanent. There is a quite general belief in some quarters that the educational work of the family is about to be surrendered to special social agencies of education, to the school. Some influential writers, generally of the socialistic tendency, have drawn up an argument for holding this belief. Their chief reason is that ordinary parents are incapable of instructing and training children and youth, that only the state can furnish nurses and teachers who have the scientific and professional equipment for the worthy task of preparing youth for citizenship.

There is a plausible ground for this view, just enough neglected truth in it to delude the unwary and to awaken the prudent. Much of the current discussion among church leaders overlooks the body of facts which socialist agitators have in mind and which are manifest in the crowded habitations of our huge cities. There it is unquestionably true that very many girls marry too young, without necessary physical maturity and without preparation for motherhood, and with only such education as they can acquire in a primary school and years of specialized labor in a department store or in a factory. It would be well for our country and for the cause of religion if those who write about moral and spiritual education would take adequate pains to bring these deplorable conditions within their mental horizon. We have able and convincing essays on home religion which are quite suitable for people who have homes; but the average flat building, occupied by low-paid, unskilled laborers with irregular employment, presents radically different problems, and the conditions call for different methods. Persons long resident in social settlements and patient missionaries among immigrants reveal a nether region which the ordinary pastor or Sunday-school teacher, psychologist, and seminary professor, living in snug comfort, must regard as alien to all he knows. It is this alien world which the socialist has chiefly in his memory when he claims that parents cannot be trusted to

educate the children of the land, and that expert nurses and teachers ought to be employed. The socialist also thinks, and sometimes speaks very bitterly, of those luxurious homes of people who in the whirl of business and social frivolities accept the burdens of parenthood with regret and pass on the task of education of their offspring to incompetent hirelings as quickly as possible. Thus at both extremes of society the argument for abandoning the educational function of the family may seem plausible on superficial examination.

But many of us think that the better way would be to correct defects; that those who are able to educate their young children should be constrained by public opinion and law to do so; that the ignorant and untrained should be encouraged and helped to perform their social task; and that nurture is as truly a social function of the family as propagation. The recent rapid growth of juvenile courts in this country, and of similar administrative measures in Europe, is an indication of the alarm of thoughtful people at the discovery that a failure of moral training in the home is a distinct national peril. The law which has been applied by these courts does not relieve parents of their responsibility, but compels them to meet their obligations with all their resources, inflicts penalties on the criminally negligent, and at the same time mercifully places them under the tuition and supervision of probation officers and charitable associations who will aid them to make good citizens out of even refractory children and youth. These measures are capable of vast expansion, and they deserve the help of all earnest people.

There is an educational function for the family which cannot be transferred to the public school, the kindergarten, or the church school. Many of the early and most important factors of education are inseparably connected with that care of the infant body which only mothers can give. The more formal, systematic, and specialized instruction, the communication of knowledge, belongs to the school; but instruction is only one element in the process of forming the character. The foundations are laid before the child can safely be sent away from the parents, and the co-operation of parental influence is necessary in every succeeding stage of development up to maturity. Just what this peculiar and essential contribution of

the family is deserves profound study. We can bring out the essential aspects by briefly considering (1) the *aim* of education, and (2) the *particular contribution* of the domestic life to spiritual nurture.

III. The *aim* of religious and moral education is just the goal and purpose of *life*, the crown of all culture. Jesus' saying is none too often quoted: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." This aim is not to be attained in fragments and sections of unrelated acts. The entire body, mind, and spirit is to be sanctified. Isolation of interests is impossible.

One turns to an ancient master of philosophy and education, even to Plato, and hears Socrates talking of the "goods of the soul"—as temperance, justice, courage, quickness of apprehension, memory, magnificence, and the like. Health and strength, beauty and wealth, are also profitable, but only when they come under a guiding principle, and virtue is religious in origin, for "virtue comes to the virtuous by the gift of God."

There are three aspects of this aim of education, and they must be seen stereoscopically, on all sides at once, as if character had three dimensions; and these aspects are (1) personality, (2) devotion to our kind, and (3) consecration to God. Each involves the other.

We speak of the perfection of personality as our aim; but we do not mean a fixed limit, a fine quality of dwarfed proportions; and therefore our sage Emerson preferred the word "greatness" as the ideal of personal culture. Personality is not the equivalent of egotism. The person must be a *socius*, a companion, a member of the race, of kind to his kind, a neighbor to all. For selfishness is the essence of sin, and it cuts off all roots which might nourish the soul and leaves it to wither. Personality is still incomplete in the human community and demands converse with God. This divine and heavenly summit reached, the Mont Blanc of the range of spiritual mountain heights, all lower ranges of being and interests are seen radiant with the shining of God. "Virtue is the gift of God."

IV. The family offers an indispensable contribution to the elementary spiritual nurture, to right life.

1. Deeper and earlier than clear, rational reasoning there are experiences which well up from the soul of the infant in response to the stimuli of parental touch and care. Has ever anyone described

the very fountain and origin of religious consciousness better than the good, gentle, prophetic, awkward Pestalozzi?

The best way for a child to learn to fear God is to see and hear a real Christian. . . . The home is the true basis of the education of humanity. It is the home that gives the best moral training, whether for private or public life. . . .

Once again I look into my own heart for an answer to my question, and ask myself: How does the idea of God take root in my soul? Whence comes it that I believe in God, that I abandon myself to him, and feel happy when I love him and trust him, thank him and obey him?

Then I soon see that the sentiments of love, trust, gratitude, and obedience must first exist in my heart before I can rise to loving, thanking, trusting, and obeying God. "For he who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love his Father in heaven whom he hath not seen?" I next ask myself: How is it that I come to love men, to trust them, to thank them and obey them? How do these sentiments take root in my heart? And I find that it is principally through the relations which exist between a mother and her infant child.

The mother must care for her child, feed it, protect it, amuse it. She cannot do otherwise; her strongest instincts impel her to this course. And so she provides for its needs, and in every possible way makes up for its powerlessness. Thus the child is cared for and made happy, and the first seed of love is sown within him.

Then he describes with some details the rise of trust, gratitude, and obedience, the feeling and the ideas which correspond to them, and all in response to the stimulus which arises in relation of child to mother:

These elements are also the elements of religious development, and it is by faith in its mother that the child rises to faith in God.

[The child] no sooner hears God's name from his mother's lips than he glows with gladness. . . . This first attempt of a loving, simple-minded mother to subordinate the child's growing feeling of independence to faith in God, by connecting faith with certain moral tendencies that are already more or less developed, furnishes education with the fundamental principles from which it must start if it is to succeed in ennobling men.

2. Habits are the means by which actions and movements are transformed into second nature, the basis of character; and habits are started at birth, and continue through childhood and youth into manhood. Punctuality, truthfulness, order, neatness, cleanliness, kindness, usefulness, reverence, and all else that is desirable in character, are fashioned by securing the almost unthinking repetition of right actions and of symbolic gestures and postures.

Plato again noticed long ago how education begins in the home:

Education and admonition commence in the first years of childhood, and last to the very end of life. Mother and nurse, and father and tutor, are quarreling about the improvement of the child as soon as ever he is able to understand them; he cannot say or do anything without their setting forth to him that this is just and that is unjust; this is honorable, that is dishonorable; this is holy, that is unholy; do this and abstain from that. And if he obeys, well and good; if not, he is straightened by threats and blows, like a piece of warped wood. At a later stage they send him to teachers.

No action, whether foul or fair,
Is ever done, but it leaves somewhere
A record, written by fingers ghostly,
As a blessing, or a curse, or mostly
In the greater weakness or greater strength
Of the acts which follow it, till at length
The wrongs of ages are redressed
And the justice of God made manifest.

—Longfellow, "The Golden Legend."

3. The *ideas* of morality and religion are the late and ripe fruit of feeling and habitual conduct. There is, of course, an intellectual element in the first conscious movements, sensations, and emotions, but only with youth can there come an orderly and extended system of thoughts. Truth can be gradually formulated on the basis of previous experiences. When doctrine is made clear, articulate, distinct, rational, it reacts upon the life of feeling and volition and habit. If the doctrine happily is a worthy conception of God, it helps the moral life, clarifies, enlarges, exalts, and refines the disposition. It is not enough to set an example of goodness before a child, nor even to cause him to do good actions himself; he must have a name for his vague experiences, must voice his aspiration, must give a rational and even æsthetic form to his devoutness. It is not a creed or a catechism which hurts the child's soul, but the monstrous and immoral dogma and the inquisitorial torture which stir revolt, and the unreality of verbal formulas which signify nothing and cause insincerity at once and scepticism in after-years.

V. There is time for only one application of these considerations, and that shall be to family worship. Domestic religion must find some kind of suitable liturgical expression.

To the very suggestive discussions already mentioned we may

add certain illustrations of a regulative principle which should govern here. Family worship, to be useful, or even tolerable, must grow naturally out of the ordinary course of life, be fitted into it, and reveal its real spirit. It must be for children, where there are children; and they must, during the years of education, be active in it, not merely passive victims of it. It must not frighten them away from God's altar, where even birds make their nests in security. It must be expansive and not repressive.

There is seen occasionally a humorous caricature of a form of family worship—a picture in which the father is on his knees, apparently saying a long prayer for his own edification, while his brood of youngsters are ready to burst with merriment at the sight of a cat perched on the safe height of a chair, with curved back and hair on end defying the attack of a puppy. The old man is utterly oblivious of what is going on at home while he talks to a distant God. He is evidently not in the same world with his children, and it is not their fault. If they pretended to follow him, it would be hypocrisy. If there ever is a time when the patriarch needs to have both eyes open, it is when his five children gather about the "Olympian" when he addresses the Unseen. One can with safety be blind, deaf, and absent-minded at any other moment. The teacher at worship must read every sign which reveals the inner consciousness of children at prayer. We are in great danger of sacrificing our children to conventional form. The most beautiful rituals of worship are conducted with open eyes. Some of us, brought up to distrust printed prayers, are coming to discover that they may occasionally be so used as to deliver us from slavery to stereotyped "extempore" forms.

How simple and natural was the act in which Jesus instituted the eucharist: "And as they were eating, he took bread, and when he had blessed, he brake it, saying, Take ye: this is my body. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave to them; and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many. And when they had sung a hymn they went out." No child would desire to run away from that dramatized prayer. The study is ineffably sweet. The Master who taught little children to regard themselves as his own by taking them into his gentle and affectionate embrace, is always ready to use physical

symbols to help those who live in the flesh to press their way by tangible and visible means into the meaning of the divine word. Why should the members of a family retire from the table to proceed in stately order to a service which is cut off from the happiness, comfort, laughter, and joy of the natural meeting of all? Why should they turn their backs on each other when the Giver of all good is addressed? Why should not the children themselves seek out and bring to that place the finest expressions of adoration and gratitude which literature can furnish? Many a wise mother has learned by holy instinct that it is a sacred privilege to connect the brief phrase of hope and trust with the evening caress and the delicious revery of a child falling asleep. Too often the formal family worship is torture and its words but vain repetitions, the tone neither of earth nor of heaven. The voice is that of an actor, and reality has gone out of it.

If the children are studying German at school, they might well repeat the touching sentence which reminds one of Fra Angelico's "Pilgrim Christ:"

Komm, Herr Jesu, sei unser Gast,
 Und segne was Du uns bescheret hast.
 (Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest,
 And bless what thou hast given us.)

The home ever remains the primary temple, and the light of worship on the altar must not go out, lest the world grow dark. Worship should be a natural, sincere, and joyous part of a great life of love, order, beauty, wisdom, and happiness; the children should be active agents in its observance; and its ritual should be symbols taken from the ordinary acts of familiar life, as Jesus made of the common meal the lasting memorial of himself and the central mystery of the Christian church.

In liberty of holy glee,
 Accept thy childhood's part,
 And thou shalt find, by faith enshrined,
 The Father in thy heart.